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The Woman Voter

A radio discussion over WGN and the Mutual Broadcasting System

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The Woman Voter

MR. McBURNEY: In discussing the woman voter, I suggest we begin by getting this political giant identified. When were women first granted the franchise, Mrs. Van der Vries?

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: In 1920.

MR. McBURNEY: And some states, I take it, had preceded that.

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: Yes, in a number of states women were able to vote in state and local elections for a number of years before 1920.

MR. McBURNEY: And how did this final decision to give women the right to vote evolve? Could you give us a little of that story?

Steps to Admendment

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: So far as I know, it really started back in the slavery days with the abolition movement. Women took their places in that, and then they worked up into the prohibition movement. Then in World War I women were very effective, not only in war work, but in leading many movements for the betterment of women and children, and in fact, for men, too. It was because of that final push, so to speak, in World War I, that the Congress of the United States passed the Amendment which was ratified by the states and became effective in 1920.

MR. McBURNEY: Were we relatively slow in giving women the vote, Kahn, as a nation?

MR. KAHN: No, I wouldn't say so on the whole. Our history parallels quite closely that of many West European nations. Of course, there are one or two conspicuous early franchisements of women. New Zealand, for example, gave women the right to vote in 1893.

MR. McBURNEY: I was going to ask someone around the table here how many women voters we have. Could you answer that, Mrs. Van der Vries?

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: As I under-

stand it, there are some ninety million people in the United States who are eligible to vote. There are about sixty-five million who are registered, in other words, who qualify for voting, and I think about 51 of those are women.

'More Women Voters'

MR. McBURNEY: That means, in other words, that the women could outvote the men if they wanted to get together.

MR. DALEY: They surely could.

MR. McBURNEY: Does that disturb you at all, Mr. Daley?

MR. DALEY: No, because I feel the women will always exercise good judgment in voting.

MR. McBURNEY: And you are certain — may I interpolate — that they won't get together! [Laughter] What percentage of women exercise their right to vote?

MR. KAHN: That's not an easy question to answer because as in many other things, people are more virtuous in retrospect about their voting behavior. We find that in talking to people after a major Presidential election, approximately 60 per cent of the women said that they had voted. This represents, as I say, a slight exaggeration. On the other hand, it was about 10 per cent fewer than was the case among men.

MR. McBURNEY: In other words, men are more likely than women, to the tune of 10 per cent, to exercise their franchise.

MR. KAHN: That is right.

MRS. DAWSON: There were some studies made in Louisiana which showed that there about 94 per cent of the men were registered and only about 60 per cent of the women were registered, and also in Vermont, there were more men registered than there were women.

MR. McBURNEY: What women vote? How would you characterize them? Or to repeat my question, what women vote?

Comparison With Men

MR. KAHN: Well, I suppose the most important fact that we might bring out there — at least according to our 1948 study — is that the women who vote have many of the same characteristics as do the men voters. In other words, the women voters are concentrated in the upper income and upper educational brackets. Larger proportions of women in these groups vote than in the lower income and lower education groups. However, there is this fact to be added. Women vote more according to their interest and awareness of issues than men do.

MR. McBURNEY: Would you make any distinction between women in rural districts and women in metropolitan areas as voters? Does your data cover that at all?

MR. KAHN: Yes, it does. It's clear that both for men and women the largest proportion of voters is to be found in metropolitan areas, and in rural areas we have the largest proportion of the stay-at-homes.

MR. McBURNEY: I suspect this begins to get the woman voter identified. We will have more to say about it as our discussion progresses, but more important, perhaps, what effect has the woman's vote had? I am going to ask a very difficult question. I will put it to you, Mr. Kahn. Is there any reason to believe that local, state and national elections would have had different outcomes if women had not voted?

MR. KAHN: That question is just difficult enough so that I couldn't give you a factual answer to it if I wanted to. The only thing that we might conclude is that there is just enough difference — at least judging from the 1948 election — there is just enough difference between the distribution of the men's vote and that of the women's so that in an extremely close election, the women's vote might be the crucial difference.

MR. McBURNEY: Might not the women's vote make a more significant difference in local elections, Mrs. Van der Vries?

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: I think it would. I don't have the statistics on national elections, and I don't have them definitely for local elections, but I have heard of a number of local elections in which women were given the credit for a change in the government. For example, a number of years ago, I believe it was in New Orleans, the women were given considerable credit for changing the government there.

'Crusaders'

MR. DALEY: Women have always been great crusaders, and what Mrs. Van der Vries says is so true. Where they become interested in local problems, whether it's the school or police or fire or some park improvement, we find them very, very active, in many instances swaying the individual population of a township or a community on a particular proposition.

MR. McBURNEY: Your data, Kahn, suggests that in a close national election the women's vote might make a difference, might change the result. Is that correct?

MR. KAHN: Yes, it's a possibility. In fact, according to the information that we have on the 1948 election, the women voted, as did the men, to give a plurality to the Democratic Party. In the case of the women, however, that plurality was less than for the men.

MR. McBURNEY: By and large, Mrs. Dawson, do you think that married women vote the same way as their husbands?

MRS. DAWSON: I think a great many of them do, but I believe Mr. Kahn's figures bring out that . . .

MR. McBURNEY: . . . there are some exceptions.

MRS. DAWSON: Yes, that's right, and that educated women in general make up their minds themselves as to how they wish to vote on the issue.

MR. KAHN: Lazarsfeld, in his study of political behavior in 1940, got into this very interesting question and among the results he reported are these: In only about one case in twenty did he find a couple, husband and wife, voting for different political parties. However, there were more frequent instances of family disagreement where other relationships were involved, so that the frequency of parents and children voting differently or disagreeing was about one in ten, and when it came to in-laws, the proportion went up to one in five.

MR. McBURNEY: I think that's a very significant observation, indeed. [Laughter]

MRS. DAWSON: Is that an indication of domestic tranquillity? [Laughter]

MR. McBURNEY: And I might add the fact that in so many cases when the women vote with their husbands, it might not mean that the husbands were influencing the wives. Maybe the wives were influencing the husbands. Would you have a comment on that?

MR. KAHN: Well, it's quite likely that that influence could go in either direction. However, the husbands are a little more reticent to admitting that influence than their wives. We found that wives much more frequently mentioned being influenced by their husbands than the reverse.

'Domestic Tranquillity'

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: That is probably for domestic tranquillity, too. [Laughter]

MR. KAHN: I suppose so.

MR. DALEY: I was going to say in many instances the husband is influenced, and he doesn't know it.

MR. McBURNEY: Do you think that women as well as men vote as families pretty much, vote as their fathers have voted before them? What do you think about that, Kahn?

MR. KAHN: Well, there is good evidence and mainly from Lazarsfeld again, that the family votes pretty much as a unit, and that that unit is something less than unanimous. There

are disagreements, in other words. However, when we remember that families are likely to be similar with respect to income, place of residence and other such characteristics, this agreement isn't very surprising.

Effect on Parties

MR. McBURNEY: Yes, I was going to ask Mr. Daley over here whether the enfranchisement of women has had any appreciable effect on the political parties.

MR. DALEY: I think it has made the political parties more conscious of their responsibility. As party organizations, when they now embrace the women, naturally they have to give opportunities to womanhood like they have in selecting a woman as national committeeman, a state committeeman, a county chairlady, and in other respects. For example, in every ward in Chicago they have selected a woman ward committeeman.

MR. McBURNEY: I understand when you say "they embrace the women," you are speaking figuratively.

MR. DALEY: That's right. [Laughter]

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: I would like to disagree with Mr. Daley a little bit. They have taken on the women. Maybe they have embraced them. I don't think they have. The political parties have never really given women their just rights. They appoint women to positions within the party, but those women are accountable to the men who appoint them. They are allowed very little independence. They would be removed promptly if they became independent. I think the political parties use women too much for serving refreshments at meetings. The coffee and the sandwiches and all those things, are the things they like best among the women.

MR. McBURNEY: Of course, those are things that women do awfully well.

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: Yes, and perhaps those things attract votes, but I don't think the political parties have really given women the chance they should have.

MR. DALEY: Mrs. Van der Vries, the women will be recognized as their importance develops in community, state and national levels. We have sent women to the United States Senate. There has been a woman elevated to the important position of Secretary of Labor under our late President. There is now a woman who is the President of the Illinois State Civil Service. I agree with you that we should give more recognition to women in various public offices, and I think it will come as we continue to enlarge our views on womanhood and their importance in our political setup.

MRS. DAWSON: But in order to get that recognition probably women really need to get out and work in their political party.

MR. DALEY: That is right.

MR. McBURNEY: Do you have any trouble getting women interested in politics? Do they want to work in the political party, do you think?

MRS. DAWSON: I think a great many women are not very much interested in politics, and I am sorry to say that, too. I feel that oftentimes they are not as interested in the issues which face the country as they should be, and that they need education. That is why they need organizations such as the League of Women Voters and other groups that are interested in this business of citizen education.

MR. DALEY: We find when you get a woman precinct worker and she is active, in many cases she is much more productive than the man captain. We find also in certain precincts in Chicago where you have quite a rapid change-over from men captains to women and where you do get the interest of women on a local level, they can be quite a factor in both political parties.

Precinct Captains

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: Mr. Daley, you say women can be very useful, and very fine as precinct captains, that they can even outshine the men, but my quarrel with political parties is that the women are not taken into the councils where they have some-

thing to say about the candidates, and your slate-making groups and so forth. Again, you like to use the women to do a lot of the work, but you don't give them anything to say.

MR. DALEY: No, on the contrary. If we adopt — which is something I think you agree with — election of precinct captains, then women will be elected precinct captains, and they will have something to say about the political issues.

MR. McBURNEY: I take it that precinct captains are appointed now. Is that peculiar to Illinois, or is that generally true or do you know?

MR. DALEY: It is generally true.

MR. McBURNEY: You think if they were elected, more women would get into politics, and I take it you would like to see that.

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: I certainly would.

MR. KAHN: I am far from a political expert, but I have a feeling that this job of door-to-door education or organization is perhaps being run down, and I want to speak a word to the contrary. What findings we have, when we ask people the things which influence their votes, indicate very clearly that personal contact is by a good deal the most important of the factors which people remember, and this is particularly true among women. They mention personal conversations and contacts as being more important than any of the mass media — radio or newspapers.

MR. McBURNEY: Did you have something to add, Mr. Daley?

MR. DALEY: All I was going to say, following up what Mr. Kahn said, is that the precinct activity of both men and women is the greatest thing we can do in our political organization.

Effect on Campaigns

MR. McBURNEY: Has the women's vote had any appreciable effect on the nature of political campaigns, Mrs. Van der Vries? Do you think more babies have been kissed, and are the candidates paying a little more attention to sartorial excellence?

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: As a candidate I have never yet kissed a baby. [Laughter] I like babies, but I don't like everybody's baby. I think that the woman's vote has made campaigns more respectable. I mean, I think the campaigns are conducted to interest women, and I think candidates are, of course, anxious to appeal to women. I know as a woman I try to put my best foot forward and wear my best clothes out to campaign meetings, and I suppose the men have the same concern. I think we are aware of the woman's vote, but as a woman, I don't go out and try to make a distinction between men and women. I am interested in all voters.

MR. McBURNEY: Of course, you do see some change in the polling places.

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: Yes, there has been quite a decided change in the polling places. I can recall in the early days in which I voted, many of our polling places were in livery stables and saloons. Of course, in Kansas where I lived at that time we didn't have saloons, officially, but I do think women have been responsible for many of the laws to make elections better. I know here in Illinois women were responsible for permanent registration laws. I mean, they really spearheaded the movements. They also spearheaded the movement for voting machines, whether you like them or not, and all in all, I think women have had a lot to do with trying to clean up elections.

MR. McBURNEY: I was going to ask next, and I will address this question to you, Mrs. Dawson, about the way you would assess the competence of the woman's vote. Do you think women know as much about the issues as the men? We have been talking pretty much about how they vote and whether they vote, but when they do vote, do they vote intelligently? Do they know what they are voting on? Do they understand the issues?

'Educate Women Voters'

MRS. DAWSON: I think a great many women do read the newspapers as much as the men do, and sometimes they are not as interested in the issues.

That is why we have to keep plugging away at education of women voters because they need information so that they can vote intelligently, and we need to keep urging them, too, as the figures show, so that more women will get out to exercise this privilege which we have.

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: I don't suppose women voters are as intelligent as they should be, but I frankly think they are more intelligent than the men voters. [Laughter] I think they are exposed to more education than the men. Women are great joiners. They belong to organizations. They belong to woman's clubs. They belong to parent-teacher associations. They belong to lodges. They belong to patriotic organizations. All of these organizations have at least one program during the year on government, some phase of government or legislation or something of that sort. When women are at home, they listen to the radio a lot, and they may not read the newspapers as much as they should, but there are a great many women's magazines that are published that are now carrying on great campaigns to inform women.

'Word of Mouth Campaign'

MR. DALEY: And if we agree that word-of-mouth is the most effective campaigning, surely the women in their conversations whether it be at the store, the beauty parlor or at the community center, are in closer contact with their friends and their neighbors and their people.

MRS. DAWSON: You mean the women talk more?

MR. DALEY: Yes, I would say so. [Laughter]

MR. KAHN: I think one of the things which shows up when we ask women and men what decided their votes is perhaps not so much that the women talk more as that they talk to different people, that they are influenced in different ways. Men most frequently indicate that conversations on the job, business contacts, influenced their votes. Women are more likely to mention conversations within the family. Whether this means that the woman's vote is being directed by the

husband, I will leave to the political expert.

MR. McBURNEY: Do you think women are more inclined to vote for personalities rather than issues, Mrs. Van der Vries?

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: I don't know how to answer that.

MR. McBURNEY: That has been said. It has been suggested that a photogenic person in this day of television might command a pretty substantial women's vote.

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: Well, I am sure that I was never elected for any photogenic reasons.

MR. McBURNEY: You are being very modest now, Mrs. Van der Vries.

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: And when I look at many of my fellow office-holders, I am sure they weren't photogenic either.

MR. McBURNEY: In that, I can concur. [Laughter] Is there anything in this point I am making, do you think?

MRS. DAWSON: The biggest vote is brought out by a great interest in an issue, apparently. Isn't that true, Mr. Kahn?

MR. KAHN: Well, that was found to be particularly true for women. At least, in the 1940 election. Men were more likely to say in some cases that they voted out of a sense of obligation or rather that they voted without any great interest in the issues. The women, if they were not interested in the issues, stayed home and were pretty unabashed about it.

Personalities on Issues?

MR. DALEY: Getting back to the personality question, I don't think you can discount the personality factor in any candidate for any office whether he be a candidate for President or state or local offices.

MR. McBURNEY: And perhaps you shouldn't.

MR. DALEY: Undoubtedly you shouldn't. I think the women have greater powers of observation than men, and naturally they are influenced by the man or his family or his appearance or his speech or the sincerity with which he campaigns.

MR. KAHN: In analyzing people's statements about their voting behavior in 1948, we were struck by the frequency with which both men and women mentioned personal characteristics of the candidates, and if you like, personality traits and impressions, in contrast to those people who spoke only in terms of foreign and domestic issues.

MR. McBURNEY: Continuing this discussion of the competence of the woman's vote, Kahn, do you think that women are more likely to support progressive social legislation? Do you have any evidence on that at all? I am thinking of child labor legislation, of the control of working hours, of legislation of that sort.

Progressive or Conservative?

MR. KAHN: We have no direct information on that from our own research. There is a rather classic study done by a man named Tingsten at the University of Stockholm. He suggests that in spite of the fact that certain progressive parties in various European countries fought very hard for the women's vote, that the women did not reward these parties by voting for them, that the women's votes, according to his analysis, have on the whole been somewhat more conservative than those of the men.

MRS. DAWSON: But I think women are more interested in social legislation. They work through the party of their choice, but they want to bring about an improvement in working conditions and they favor various forms of social legislation.

MR. McBURNEY: You would agree with that, Mrs. Van der Vries?

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: Absolutely. I think many of the moves for social legislation have been started by women. Consider the various movements that Jane Addams headed and Julia Lathrop and women of that type. Of course, most of the laws had to be enacted by men because there weren't any women in our legislative bodies to work on them, but the pressure started with the women.

MR. McBURNEY: We have been talking at considerable length here about

the way the women have exercised their franchise. What has been the effect of the vote on women? Do you think it has had any appreciable effect on them?

Effect on Women

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: Well, it has given a great many women an opportunity to serve in government which I think is a wonderful thing. I think it has been a great thing for women to be able to get out and actively participate, and I think it has been good for women in general too. Whether they have used the franchise as fully as they should, it has been a good thing for them certainly.

MR. McBURNEY: Do you think so, too, Mrs. Dawson?

MRS. DAWSON: I think so. I think it is too bad that more women don't avail themselves of the privilege of voting. I think they need more education. It is something we need to keep working at all the time so that they will feel that they can vote intelligently, not only vote, but vote intelligently.

MR. McBURNEY: And what advice would you give to women voters, Mrs. Van der Vries?

MRS. VAN DER VRIES: I suggest they get out and be aggressive and get into the party circles because, after all, it is the parties that select the candidates. I think they have got to be almost militant about it.

MR. McBURNEY: Would you have any advice to offer the women voters, Mr. Daley?

MR. DALEY: I would say to all women that the first thing they must do is register. We should have more people registered right here in Cook County. After they have registered, I would urge that they participate in the community activities regardless of where they live, and also that they join either political party because only through the political parties which are now established will they be able to make the fine contribution they are capable of making.

MR. McBURNEY: Do you have a word of advice for them, Mrs. Dawson?

The Informed

MRS. DAWSON: I think we all need to inform ourselves upon the issues and upon the candidates for whom we vote and then vote.

MR. McBURNEY: And I take it that the League of Women Voters which you represent is dedicated pretty much to that purpose.

MRS. DAWSON: That is right.

MR. McBURNEY: As a college professor, do you have any advice to the women voter?

MR. KAHN: As a college professor, I think not. The only thing I might echo as another citizen would be the idea that has already been mentioned, that men and women both exercise more fully the franchise to vote. Only about half the eligible voters were active in 1948.

ANNOUNCER: I'm sorry, ladies and gentlemen, but our time is up.



Suggested Reading



Compiled by William Huff,
and M. Helen Perkins, Reference Department,
Deering Library, Northwestern University.

BRUMBAUGH, SARA B. *Democratic Experience and Education in the National League of Women Voters*. New York, Columbia University, Teachers College, 1946. (Contributions to Education, no. 916.)

A detailed study of the educational ideas and procedures of the most important organization devoted to impartial enlightenment of the voting public.

LAZARSFELD, PAUL FELIX; BERELSON, BERNARD; and GAUDET, HAZEL. *The People's Choice; How the Voter Makes Up His Mind in a Presidential Campaign*. New York, Duell, 1947.

The report of extensive research in 1940 to determine the political attitudes and behavior of the American voter, male and female.

National American Woman Suffrage Association. *Victory; How Women Won It*. New York, H. W. Wilson, 1940.

A history of the suffrage movement, presented in symposium form by several prominent feminist leaders.

POLLOCK, JAMES K. *Voting Behavior: A Case Study*. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1939. (Michigan Governmental Studies, No. 3.)

A study of 24 elections held in Ann Arbor between 1924 and 1932, in which the difference in participation in voting between men and women is significant.

TINGSTEN, HERBERT. *Political Behavior: Studies in Election Statistics*. London, P.S. King, 1937.

A long chapter of this detailed statistical study is concerned with women and politics, revealing generally lower voting participation and greater conservatism among women.

American Association of University Women Journal 41:17-18, Oct., '47. "The Inexperienced Politician." O. R. GOLDMAN.

An unsuccessful candidate for Congress describes her campaign in terms of her lack of previous political experience. She urges more women to assume full political responsibility by running for office and participating in party politics.

Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 251:1-184, May, '47. "Women's Opportunities and Responsibilities." L. M. YOUNG, Ed.

Four chapters of this special issue devoted to the position of women in society are directly concerned with the woman voter, her interest or lack of it in politics, her activities in the political parties and government, and her impact on public opinion.

Journal of Home Economics 39:391-5, Sept., '47. "Homemaker as a Citizen." MRS. R. SAYRE.

In describing the essential characteristics of good citizenship, Mrs. Sayre emphasizes the need for the woman voter to assume real responsibility, by having thorough knowledge of issues and candidates' records and by taking an active part in partisan political activities.

Ladies Home Journal 68:51, Oct., '51. "What Women Did in Gary."

By forming a political bloc and exercising voting and potential voting pressures the women of Gary cleaned up a city once full of organized crime.

New York Times Magazine p. 14, May 30, '48. "Political Behavior in the Human Female." G. GORER.

An English anthropologist regrets that women are stronger in urging morality in men and nations than they are in securing it by means of intelligent voting and active political work.

New York Times Magazine p. 18, Aug. 20, '50. M. ADAMS.

In spite of having had the vote for thirty years, American woman is little better off than her grandmother. One reason advanced is the refusal of women to get into political party organizations, where basic policies and decisions are made.

Saturday Evening Post 221:23, July 17, '48. "We Women Throw Our Votes Away." S. B. ANTHONY, 2d.

More than half of the potential voters in the United States are women, yet their political force is negligible because of their failure to form a voting bloc.

Survey Graphic 37:508-9, Dec., '48. "Women Are a Fantasy." H. SMITH.

In the course of an evaluation of woman's position in the modern world, the author scores her apathy in political affairs.

United Nations World 4:48-52, Feb., '50. "Three Freedoms for Women." L. VITRAY.

An international survey of women's political rights, including the franchise, lacking or limited in many nations.

JUL 1



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